

THE HISTORY OF SEDGWICK COUNTY, KANSAS

To the hardy pioneers of a great county, whose early hardships, fortitude and patience has made the desert to blossom like the rose and whose enterprise and faith has builded in the great American desert a peerless city and converted the erstwhile favorite feeding-ground of the buffalo into fruitful farms, with grateful acknowledgments to the gifted contributors, whose facile pens have so much embellished these pages, and especially to the press of Sedgwick county, which has proven a fund of reliable information; and more especially to that noble woman, Mrs. J. R. Mead, and that eminent lawyer and savant, Kew Harris, this History of Sedgwick County is affectionately inscribed, by

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The Editor-in-Chief.

INTRODUCTION

Few counties of the United States possess the stirring and romantic history that attached to Sedgwick county. None has within such a short period of time achieved the fame and acquired the commanding commercial importance as the City of Wichita. Within the span of two generations, within the memory of men who are still in the prime of life, the wilderness has been transformed and a rich and thriving community has taken the place where once the Indians roamed at will and hunted the wild game, with which the prairie were so plentifully stocked. Nature provided the ideal site for the creation of such a city. But it was the work of man to build it, and few of those who now enjoy the benefits of their work have any adequate conception of the difficulties and hardships that the pioneers of Sedgwick county had to surmount. The builders of Wichita were men of undomitable perseverance. They were men who were endowed with prophetic vision. Unless they had been possessed of all these traits of character the city of Wichita would never have come into existence. They were able to forecast the future with a certainty that can only be characterized as marvelous, in view of the fulfillment of their predictions. They were laughed at as dreamers of dreams, they were scoffed at as visionaries. They were held up to ridicule, but the sturdiness and virility of these pioneers at last won the day for their cause, and the scoffers in time became the zealous converts and the active co-workers of the men they had ridiculed.

To adequately write the history of Sedgwick county has been a work unaccompanied with tremendous difficulties. It has necessitated laborious investigation and research, and the cooperation of many of the oldest citizens. Of the history of the city itself, there is ample material to be obtained from the pioneers of the state and territory. Many of these have long since passed to the other side, but they have left that record of their time. Still others are yet living, ripe in years and experience, but with a vivid recollection of the early days of the city's building

and a keen interest in relating the experiences of those epochal days. The stories of these pioneers form an indispensable and one of the most interesting parts of the present work. They possess also the additional value of authenticity. There is nothing of legend or tradition about their narratives. They are the plain, unvarnished tales of men and women, who bore the heat and burden of those days of trying endeavor, who endured almost incredible hardships, who never lost faith in the future greatness of their city and county, and many of whom still live to exult in its beauty and progress and to prophesy that the astounding development of today is but the forerunner of still greater things to come.

And who shall venture to assert that they are not right and justified in these predictions? Marvelous as have been the developments of the past, what finite mind will set the barrier at which progress shall cease? The commerce which has made Wichita the greatest shipping point in the Southwest will not dwindle as the years pass. The wealth of the inconceivable richness of the soil in Kansas, and Sedgwick county in particular, will continue, for ages to come, to pour a flood of riches through this natural gateway. The thousands of acres of the choicest farming lands in the world which the county possesses will in time form the homes of many hundreds of thousands of people, all of whom will contribute their moiety to the progress of the city of Wichita. The great Southwest will, year by year, send an ever increasing stream of its varied products to the city, there to be distributed to the markets of the world. The flood of commerce between the Orient and the East which will grow by leaps and bounds in the future, will always seek the city, because of its unrivalled transportation facilities. The unparalleled advantages which the city has to offer for manufacturing will in time make it one of the great industrial communities of the West. Here are all the essential conditions for the building of a great city, and with them nothing can stop its future growth and progress.

When Wichita sprang into being forty years ago, it was the only settlement in Sedgwick county. Today there are a score of more of villages within a radius of twenty-five miles of the city, and this development of the county is no less marvelous than that of the city. These cities are a part of the exploitation of the agricultural resources of the county, but they are not

mere camps. They are built to stay. They are cities in every sense of the word. Their schools and churches are equal to those of any city of the land. Their public buildings, residences and streets are metropolitan in character. They enjoy all the luxuries and refinements of life, with a climate that is ideal in character. These cities are progressive, alert, gifted with a fine sense of civic pride, and steadily forging ahead to a greater development. In time they will become the commercial centers of the great and rich agricultural country and productive farms. The supremacy which Sedgwick county now enjoys, of being the richest county, agriculturally, of the state, is solely because of the unequalled richness of its soil for agricultural purposes.

The publishers of this history desire to acknowledge the cordial and valuable assistance which has been accorded them in its compilation by many citizens of Wichita and Sedgwick county. It has been a help deeply appreciated, and deserves due recognition. Among those to whom thanks are due are the Eagle and the Beacon, whose store of valuable historical collections have been freely drawn upon, as well as the many contributors whose names head their contributions.